

ESF 15

Emergency Operations Plan – Emergency Support Function 15
External Affairs

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Lead Agencies

- Governor’s Office
- Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management - Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)

1.2 Supporting Agencies

Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management - Maine National Guard (MENG)

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Section 2: Purpose, Scope, Situation and Assumptions

2.1 Purpose

Emergency Support Function-15 (ESF-15), External Affairs, with its procedural documents, provides for the distribution of official information and instructions to the public in a potential or actual emergency. It promulgates policies and procedures for the dissemination of emergency information. It identifies resources for the development and implementation of public awareness programs for identified hazards. It establishes procedures for a Joint Information System (JIS), Joint Information Center (JIC), a Help Line Center, and a Media Center (MC) that provide timely and accurate emergency information to the media.

2.2 Scope

In any emergency, people want and need information on the nature of the event, and how they can best protect themselves and their families. The better informed the public, and the more they can help themselves and their neighbors in an emergency, the lesser the burden on first responders. It is incumbent on government at all levels to ensure that the public has the emergency information they need to make good decisions for themselves, their families, and their businesses.

- The Public Information Officer (PIO), in consultation with policy officials, sets the policy for emergency information and directs the JIC and the MC.
- MEMA works with the Governor's Office and other departments to facilitate the collection and presentation of emergency information to the public.
- Emergency information is disseminated by the media, the Internet and other electronic outlets and, if appropriate, through the Emergency Alert System (EAS). The PIO and staff provide the information to the media and the public if the MC is not open.
- All unverified information is investigated and either verified or debunked.
- Radio, television, and newspaper announcements are monitored to ensure accuracy.
- Lists of media contacts are kept up-to-date.

2.3 Situation

This state, its counties, and a number of its municipalities have continuing programs using various channels of communications. These include the mass media (print, broadcast, Internet and social media platforms) and provide information about local preparedness activities and services to the public.

Radio and television stations provide emergency and public service information as a condition of their licensing. This medium may be used to inform the public of preparedness for and recovery from an emergency. The EAS, news releases, and various internet sites provide emergency and public service information to the public.

The EAS serves the entire state. It can be activated in any or all areas depending on the situation or emergency impacts. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio provides weather information and emergency warnings. NOAA Weather Radio also serves the entire state, providing constantly updated weather information and warnings, and non-weather related civil emergency warnings as requested by the state. Technical information on these two systems is found in ESF-2, Communications.

Maine 2-1-1 functions as the primary Help Line for the JIC. Maine 2-1-1 is a statewide social service referral agency. A group of trained telephone operators takes calls from the general public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In a widespread emergency, Maine 2-1-1 has the capability to provide information to the general public, and gather information from the public, as needed and requested. This capability has been exercised in many major exercises and disasters. Information in Maine 2-1-1's databases can also be accessed online.

Other special purpose communications systems are available to transmit information. The Citizen Alert System, maintained as a service of the State of Maine web site, is a subscription service by which emergency information is sent to subscribers and posted on the state website. Citizens may subscribe to emergency news issued by MEMA and other state agencies via the maine.gov subscription service. The approximately 10,000 state employees in all locations can be reached via the state e-mail system.

2.4 Assumptions

- During emergencies, the public and the media need and will seek out information about the emergency, as well as instructions on proper protective actions.
- In the absence of an imminent emergency, public interest in preparedness is generally low.
- Timely and accurate information can save lives, protect property and reduce panic and confusion. The media has an essential role in providing emergency instructions and up-to-date information to the public.
- Each county Emergency Management Agency (EMA) coordinates emergency information and education activities between its municipalities and the state. In emergencies the counties are kept informed of state media activities in their area. They also inform the state of their activities.
- Each county can function as a separate operational area with the capability to carry out emergency information and education activities within that area. The state may assist Counties or municipalities in the dissemination of locally-specific emergency information, but each local area can carry out the communications necessary to convey emergency instructions such as evacuation or shelter-in-place orders.
- The internet and electronic mail are essential tools in dispensing emergency public information and educating the public in non-emergency times. The State of Maine web site is a widely used portal to a variety of information.
- Social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter are interactive channels that can engage various publics during non-emergency times. These channels may serve both as information dissemination and reception platforms.
- Some members of the public will seek a direct line to ask questions. Maine 2-1-1 will serve in this capacity. JIC staff will provide 2-1-1 with updated information to give to callers.
- Daily newspapers are a valuable medium for communicating more in-depth information about any emergency, which helps the public to understand the situation. Weekly newspapers are widely distributed across the state and are a useful medium for communicating non-time-sensitive emergency and educational material.
- Depending on the nature and severity of the emergency, telephone networks may be disrupted. Local radio stations in the state of Maine without emergency power may be off the air. Internet sites may not be accessible.

Section 3: Concept of Operations

3.1 General

This annex will be activated at the direction of MEMA when there is the potential for a disaster or an existing disaster requiring statewide coordination of resources. The Governor, as the Executive head of State Government, has overall authority for the state's emergency response. Likewise, the Governor's Director of Communications has the overall authority for public information and media relations in an emergency. However, it is understood that the practical task of carrying out public information and media relations activities in all phases of emergencies is the responsibility of MEMA.

When the Director of Communications is on scene, he or she may assume the function of the PIO. When the Governor's Director of Communications is not present, the senior MEMA Public Information Specialist functions as the PIO. The PIO advises the senior policy officials, including the Governor, on emergency communications priorities and key messages, and ensures that all Emergency Public Information functions are carried out.

Members of the MEMA staff assist the PIO. This staff accesses information from all agencies involved in the response as well as other sources, as needed.

Joint Information System

Under the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Public Information Section functions within a JIS. All entities involved with the response coordinate their public information activities, so that the public receives clear, unambiguous messages. In a particular type of emergency, one or more agencies may have a lead role in response. Public information person(s) or spokesperson(s) for those agencies will work closely with the PIO to ensure a coordinated message.

Similarly, when the National Response Framework is activated, Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, and other federal agency PIOs are part of the JIS and therefore will coordinate with the state PIO. Public messages may be issued jointly by one or more agencies.

Spokesperson

A primary broadcast spokesperson is designated on a case by case basis for each emergency. In Level One and Level Two emergencies, the PIO, the MEMA Director or the Commissioner of the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management/Adjutant General is often the spokesperson. Other trained members of the Public Information staff are empowered to answer routine media queries, but will defer complex or sensitive issues to the spokesperson. At Level 3 and above or at any time, the role of spokesperson may be assumed by the Governor's Director of Communications.

In an emergency that requires a particular expertise, the principal spokesperson may be designated from the department that is the seat of that expertise. In all cases, the principal spokesperson is supported by technical experts who can answer questions relating to a particular aspect of the response.

Joint Information Center

The PIO coordinates emergency information and education from the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC).

State Media Center

The MC functions as a briefing room and filing center during a major emergency. It is equipped with audio-visual equipment, tables, telephones, and a distributed audio feed.

3.2 Activities

Responsible agencies for ESF-15 should conduct the following activities:

a. Prevention

MEMA is responsible for year-round disaster education and risk communications activities. Non-emergency education efforts are directed toward increasing public awareness about potential hazards and how people can deal with them. All emergency information and education efforts rely on the cooperation of commercial media organizations, county and local governments, and volunteer organizations. The internet, specifically the website known as Maine Prepares (www.maineprepares.com or www.maine.gov/mema/prepare) is maintained by MEMA, is a principal repository for educational materials and also provides reference links to other materials such as those developed by the American Red Cross (ARC), FEMA, the National Weather Service (NWS) and other partners.

MEMA's risk communication plan builds on existing resources, and includes partnerships with state, federal, and volunteer agencies to communicate as effectively as possible with the general public, business owners, and local officials.

b. Preparedness

- Develop and maintain ongoing relationships with media, keeping them updated on all emergency management activities.
- Exercise EAS and other communications systems regularly.
- Have informational materials available for the public and establish a schedule of educational activities.
- Develop and maintain emergency information procedures.
- Maintain an inventory of emergency information for specific hazards, e.g., booklets, pamphlets.
- Develop and maintain Standard Operating Guidelines to distribute emergency information to the media (see the Public Information Procedures Book).
- Update pre-scripted release material, as necessary.

c. Response

i. Pre-Impact

- Assemble appropriate public information materials for distribution.
- Review all emergency information duties and assignments.
- Contact team members to check on availability for duty.
- Respond to media inquiries and requests for interviews.

- Open a dialog with the Governor's Director of Communications, informing him or her of issues and situations, receiving advice and counsel on key messages.

ii. Initial Response

- Open JIC, MC and activate Maine 2-1-1/Help Line telephone lines as indicated by operational conditions, and develop a staffing pattern to maintain the necessary level of activity.
- Produce warning and informational messages.
- Release information to the public via all appropriate channels.
- Provide assistance to draft official documents as needed (Governor's Emergency Proclamation, Request for Disaster Assistance, etc.)

iii. Ongoing Response

- Open JIC, MC and activate Maine 2-1-1/Help Line telephone lines as indicated by operational conditions, and develop a staffing pattern to maintain the necessary level of activity.
- Produce warning and informational messages.
- Release information to the public via all appropriate channels.
- Provide assistance to draft official documents as needed (Governor's Emergency Proclamation Request for Disaster Assistance, etc.)

d. Recovery

For the duration of the Recovery Phase, the Public Information section will:

- Coordinate with the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, Volume III, Interagency Disaster Recovery Plan.
- Continue emergency public information programs, especially those that focus on restoration of essential services, travel conditions, restrictions, and assistance programs available.
- Conduct an After Action Review of information programs and techniques, revising plans and procedures where necessary.

e. Mitigation

- Identify potential emergency transportation issues and collaborate to develop or recommend plans, protocols, procedures, and policies to prevent or mitigate their effects.
- As needed, conduct assessments of ESF-15 capabilities to identify potential resource shortfalls.
- As needed, develop plans to mitigate identified shortfalls of resources.

Section 4: Responsibilities

4.1 Lead Agencies

a. Governor's Office

- Sets policy.
- Approves all releases to the media or delegates that approval authority.

b. Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management - Maine Emergency Management Agency

- Coordinate the formation of all emergency information plans.
- Develop/maintain a public information and education program.
- Develop/maintain a working relationship with the media.
- Gather, research, and verify information for public release.
- Prepare/provide news releases and information to the media regarding emergency preparedness and response activities.
- Maintain an inventory of emergency information booklets and pamphlets.
- Establish and manage the JIC and MC
- Coordinate with Maine 2-1-1 for Help Line services.
- Staff the PIO section as needed.
- Maintain a chronological record of all media contacts and releases of information.
- Coordinate media tours of the SEOC and disaster sites.

4.2 Supporting Agencies

Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management - Maine National Guard

Provide personnel to support activities within the JIC if requested.

Section 5: Supplementary and Procedural Documents

- Computer Systems Setup
- EOC Access Protocols
- Form Media Inquiry
- Forms Media Sign In
- Form Public Inquiry
- JIC Operations
- JIC Setup
- Liaison with 211 Maine
- Log Helpline
- Log JIC
- Log Media Queries
- Maine Emergency Alert System (EAS) Operational Plan 2003
- Media Center Operation
- Media Center Setup
- MEMA Continuity of Operations Plan
- MEMA Create New Links
- Message Distribution Drill
- Message Distribution Event
- Message Production
- Pre-Scripted Material
- Public Information Officer
- Shelter Status Procedures
- Social Media Policy
- Social Media Procedure

Section 6: References

Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communications Guidelines for Public Officials – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2002